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HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION.

*John W.  
1883*

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE CHURCH CONGRESS OF 1874.

BY

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## **EDITOR'S NOTICE.**

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**T**HE following Address is reprinted by permission. Very few alterations have been introduced. One or two quotations have been added in order that every century of our era might be seen to testify to the continuity of Confirmation; but it has not been thought necessary to mark the additions. Nor has it been thought necessary to give references to the quotations; for those that have the works of the authors quoted will easily verify them, and to those that have not the books the reference would be useless.

**A few questions and answers have been appended.**

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## CONFIRMATION.

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AT no period of their lives do the younger members of the Church require the anxious care of their spiritual pastors more than in their preparation for Confirmation. It is the first marked crisis of their spiritual life; and the future of their growth in holiness will be seriously affected by the teaching imparted to them when, renewing their baptismal vows, they are about to receive the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Ghost. Parents, pastors, and friends, attracted by the power of sympathy, watch them with earnest prayers as they ascend the hill of the Lord, and would fain gaze with them beyond the golden gates and see the glories of the heavenly home.

It is therefore most important that under our guidance they should learn the true teaching of Confirmation; that they should receive the laying on of hands with no low, unworthy views; that they should realize the divine gifts of grace imparted to the faithful in this Apostolic ordinance.

What, then, is the essence of Confirmation, and what is its place in the Christian scheme? It is a

question which every pastor should know how to answer, if he would rightly prepare his candidates for Confirmation.

### I.—THE SCRIPTURES.

1. First we turn to Holy Scripture. The Baptism of Jesus is the type of ours—so is his Confirmation. “Baptized in the river Jordan [writes Optatus\*] by the hand of John the Baptist; the order of the sacred mysteries followed, and the Father completed what the Son had asked and the Spirit announced. The heavens were opened, and by the authority of the Father the spiritual oil immediately descended in the form of a dove . . . Whence He was called Christ.”

2. Again: when young children were brought to Jesus, He laid His hands upon them and blessed them, prefiguring the distinctive rite of Confirmation—the laying on of hands, whereby the sevenfold gifts were to be imparted to the children of the Church.

3. Once more: as by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost Jesus was prepared (according to His humanity) for the work which His Father had given Him to do, it was necessary that His disciples should be fortified in like manner for their appointed work;

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\*The renowned Bishop of Milevi in Numidia (now Algeria), who wrote A. D. 364.

accordingly He bade the Apostles to "wait for the promise of the Father," and to "tarry at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high." When the appointed time arrived, "with the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and the appearance of cloven tongues like as of fire, they were filled with the Holy Ghost." True, this pentecostal outpouring was a fulfilment of the promise, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire," but Confirmation graces were not excluded. For the connection of Confirmation with Baptism is so intimate that it is no wonder if, on this day of rich and abundant gifts, the graces and powers of both were communicated simultaneously, just as in those cases where Baptism was administered by an Apostle the laying on of hands immediately followed.

4. The gift originally bestowed on the day of Pentecost was that very gift of the Holy Ghost which our Lord promised to His Church. That same gift was conveyed by the laying on of the Apostles' hands. In both cases miraculous powers were manifested, but Christ's promised gift was not confined to miraculous phenomena—"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." So also, though the pentecostal gift was on Scripture authority a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, yet the promise was not exhausted on that first out-

pouring; but by the laying on of hands, and prayer for the sevenfold gifts, the graces of the Holy Spirit are imparted through successive ages—received by faith and exercised in love. Bishop Andrews points out an important distinction in this prophetic promise, showing the separability of the inward gifts from the miraculous manifestations. There is, he remarks, a promise of two outpourings; one "upon your sons and your daughters," the other upon "My servants and My handmaids." It is under this second promise that we claim, not as sons of Jewish parents, but as servants of God. The promise to the sons was that they should see visions and dream dreams; the promise to His servants that they should prophesy, that they should, as the Apostles did, set forth "the wonderful works of God." The reservoir of the abundant graces imparted to the faithful in Confirmation is our Incarnate Lord, upon Whom, after He had gone up from the baptismal wave, the Holy Ghost descended. The first abundant streams of love and power were poured out by Peter and John. In answer to their prayers, and the laying on of their hands, the Holy Ghost fell on the newly baptized converts of the city of Samaria;\* and in like manner when St. Paul laid his hands upon the disciples at Ephesus,† "the Holy Ghost came on them." And even so the

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\*Acts viii, 17.

†Acts xix, 6.

living water wells forth again whenever, with hearts prepared by penitence and holy resolution, the faithful kneel to receive the imposition of their spiritual father's hand. This view of Confirmation is strengthened by scattered phrases in the Apostolic Epistles, passages which gleam with a new light when seen in connection with gifts bestowed in the laying on of hands. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," writes St. John,‡ and again, "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, the same anointing teacheth you all things." And again in the Revelation,§ "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads."

In II Cor. i, 21, 22, we find what would seem to be the key words of Confirmation, "He which *establisheth* us in Christ, and hath *anointed* us is God, Who hath also given us the earnest of His Spirit in our hearts." Perpetually are these expressions quoted by theologians in reference to Confirmation; and they are found embedded as precious stones in the Confirmation Services of the Church. So frequently are they found there, and in Churches so widely separated, that it would seem highly probable that the Confirmation Services of the Apostolic age were the common source from which these expressions were drawn by writers so dissimilar in style as St. Paul and St. John.

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‡ I S. John, ii, 20, 27.

§ Rev. vii, 3.

**II. — THE FATHERS.**

Proceeding now to quote a few of the testimonies borne by succeeding Christian writers to the faith of the Church in the reality and power of the divine gifts communicated in Confirmation, we shall at the same time note the use they make of the Scripture language already quoted. St. Clement asserts that “those who receive the Spirit are stamped with the seal of truth and perfect grace.” The language here used corresponds with acknowledged titles of Confirmation, which affords a strong presumption that he here speaks of the grace of Confirmation.

Tertullian (**2nd Century**) writes: “The flesh is overshadowed by the hand that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit.”

St. Cyprian (**3rd Century**) says: “Not by imposition of hands when he receives the Holy Ghost is any one born, but he is born in the baptism of the Church, that being already born he may receive the Spirit.”

The Council of Eliberis (**4th Century**, A.D. 305) decrees that persons baptized in times of danger by laymen shall be “brought to the Bishops, that by imposition of hands they may be perfected.” St. Jerome, while vigorously contending for the powers of priests, says that “the Bishop lays his hand upon the baptized for the invocation of the Holy Spirit.” From Palestine we pass to Italy to hear the loving

voice of the great St. Ambrose: "Recollect how thou didst receive the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and the spirit of holy fear, and keep what thou hast received. God the Father sealed thee, Christ the Lord confirmed thee, and gave the earnest of His Spirit in thy heart."

Theodoret (**Vth Century**, A. D. 420) writes: "Those who have believed submit to divine baptism, and by the priestly hand receive the grace of the Holy Spirit."

St. Gregory the Great (**VIth Century**, A. D. 590) preaching to Bishops, says: "By us (the Bishops) indeed the faithful come to Holy Baptism, by our prayers are they blessed, and by the laying on of our hands they receive the Holy Ghost from God."

Amid the darkness which soon after closed around the Western Empire a gleam of faith shines out from the little island of Lindisfarne on the coast of Durham, England. "Crowds," writes the venerable Bede, "surrounding the man of God, St. Cuthbert (**VIIth Century**, A. D. 680), he preached to them for two days, and then by the laying on of hands ministered to the newly regenerate in Christ the grace of the Holy Spirit." About the same time Archbishop Theodore, of Canterbury, writes: "We believe that none is perfect in Baptism with-

out the Confirmation of the Bishop, but we do not despair of their salvation."

In the **VIIIth Century** the venerable Bede writes : "The faithful are sealed with this unction with the laying on of the Bishop's hand, by which the Holy Ghost is received."

In the **IXth Century** Bishop Haymo expresses the faith of his age in an expression which is copied from Origen in the third century, "The gift of the Holy Ghost is given in baptism by the laying on of the Bishop's hands." In a compilation about this time a passage is quoted which is thought to have been in a homily of Eusebius of Emessa (in A. D. 350) : "The two (Baptism and the laying on of hands by the Bishop) are so joined together that they cannot in any wise be severed (except death intervene), and one cannot be perfected without the other."

In the **Xth Century** Atto, Bishop of Vercellæ, (A. D. 924) says : "Laying on of hands, by which we believe the Holy Ghost is received, which is wont to be done after Baptism for confirmation of unity in the Church of Christ by the Bishops."

The later writers on the subject enter more specifically into the nature of the grace of Confirmation. In the **XIth Century** Theophylact writes, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews : "After remission of sins there follows the partaking of the

Holy Ghost: for He does not dwell in a body subjected to sins, but He was given by the laying on of hands." And Geoffrey, the Abbot of Vendome: "In Baptism remission of sins is given by the Holy Ghost: in Confirmation the Holy Ghost is invited to come and inhabit, garrison, and defend the house itself which he has sanctified."

In the **XIIth Century** Hugh of St. Victor, writes: "The laying on of hands, which is commonly called Confirmation, wherein a Christian is sealed with the unction of chrism by the laying on of hands on the forehead, is due to the Bishops alone, the vicars of the Apostles, so that they sign and seal the Christian, and give the Spirit Paraclete, just as in the primitive Church the Apostles alone are recorded to have had the power of giving the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands."

In the **XIIIth Century** Bishop Durandus writes: "After Baptism there follows the spiritual seal, that is Confirmation, which is when the Holy Ghost is outpoured at the invoking of the Bishop."

In the **XIVth Century** Nicolai Cabasilæ, Archbishop of Thessalonica, writes: "As the Spirit was given by the laying on of the Apostle's hands, so also the Paraclete now comes upon those who are anointed." And again, William of Paris: "At the laying on of the hands of the Apostles the Holy Ghost was wont to be given, and He is given now at the laying on of the hands of the Bishops."

In the XVth Century Manuel Caleca asserts that "as regeneration in Baptism is analogous to our birth, so in Confirmation, spiritual increase leading on to perfect strength resembles growth." And John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's, whose lectures on the Greek of St. Paul's Epistles helped on the Reformation, wrote: "Confirmation testifies the sure gift of the Spirit. This can be called the sign of the gifts of the Spirit. For it is the Sacrament of the giving of the Spirit, traced back to and established at the time when one was sent by the Apostles to convey to those who had already been baptized at Samaria the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands; otherwise they would not have been reckoned as belonging to the Church."

In the XVIth Century the prelates and theologians in the reign of Henry VIII speak the same language as their forefathers in the faith. But time forbids to cite more than two witnesses. The Archbishop of York quotes Melchiades: "The Holy Ghost which descended upon the waters of baptism gave full innocency at the first; but in Confirmation He gives increase to grace." Dr. Buckmaster says that Christ confirmed His disciples on the day of Pentecost, giving unto them His manifold inward graces; and that the Apostles, by the laying on of hands, imparted the same grace to the newly baptized." Nicholas Sanders bears wit-

ness to the extreme eagerness of the English in Queen Mary's reign to receive Confirmation, stating that it was more observed in England than in any nation; and nearly a century later Bishop Joseph Hall testifies to a similar eagerness: "It cannot be spoken," he says, "with what fervour and violence people were wont to come to me for this sacred ceremony;" and at the same time he expresses his own faith in the grace of Confirmation.

In the **XVIIth Century** Peter Mogilas, Metropolitan of Kieff, wrote: "As by Baptism we are regenerate, so by this holy unction (or Confirmation) we become partakers of the Holy Spirit." Dr. South says: "I look upon Confirmation as a completion of Baptism in such as outlive their childhood."

In the **XVIIIth Century** the saintly Bishop Wilson, addressing candidates, says of the effect of Confirmation: "It is to convey the inestimable blessing of the Holy Spirit of God by prayer and the imposition of hands of God's minister that He may dwell in you and keep you from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Confirmation is the perfection of Baptism. The Holy Ghost descends invisibly upon such as are rightly prepared to receive such a blessing, as at the first He came visibly upon those that had been baptized. By the imposition of the hands of God's minister

God, as it were, takes possession of you as His own peculiar creature." Again, Archbishop Wake, of Canterbury, speaks with no faltering voice: "The Apostles laid on their hands and God gave the Holy Spirit to those on whom they laid them. And we piously presume that by the fervent prayers of the Bishop and the Church those on whom he now lays his hands shall also receive the Holy Ghost, if they do but worthily prepare themselves for it."

To sum up this catena of fathers through all the centuries one must be chosen from the **XIXth Century**, and none will serve our purpose so well as the following passage from the pen of the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson: "No thread of language and history is more distinct than that which connects Christ's promise of the coming of the Paraclete to be an *indwelling Power* in all His chosen ones with the institute of the laying on of hands by the Apostles. Upon the twelve He came with a visible Epiphany, as every analogy would expect. On Christians at large He came in the plainest simplicity. 'I will send Him unto you . . . They laid their hands on them . . . He fell on them.' And ever after in the letters of the Apostles such is the frequency of the verbal and phraseological allusion to the custom that, as a scholar once remarked to me, 'Confirmation seems more present to the earliest Christian habits of thought than Baptism itself.'

Thus we have traced, in all parts of the world, through all the ages, from the Apostolic times to our own days, the witness borne by the Saints and Doctors of the Church to her unwavering faith in the gracious gifts conferred in Confirmation upon those who rightly receive it. In no age has it been considered a formal ceremony, or a mere renewal of the baptismal promises; but a holy rite, a means of grace; if not *expressly* ordained by Christ, yet by implication, through the practice of the Apostles (who in the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost were doubtless carrying out those precepts which He imparted to them during the great forty days), to be traced to His teaching Who is the source of all truth, as well as the fountain of grace and life.

### III.—THE LITURGIES.

If time permitted, an equally strong testimony to the reality of Confirmation graces might be drawn from the Services of the Church Universal, the practical expression of her faith in words of supplication or of blessing. In this one all-important respect there is a perfect agreement among all the Churches. The ancient Latin Service Books speak emphatically the same language as our own. The Greek forms embody the faith of her members in the solemn words prescribed by the 2nd General

Council, that of Constantinople (A. D. 381): "*The seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost*," for which the preceding words have prepared the minds of the worshippers; immediately follows the inspired expression of thanksgiving for grace received, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ;" and then, "The Lord is my light, the Lord is the strength of my life" (Ps. xxvii, i). In the Coptic Liturgy used of old by the Patriarchs of Alexandria the holy rite is ministered "*as the unction of the pledge of the Kingdom of God*." In the Æthiopic Church, "*The unction of the grace of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of the Kingdom of God*." In the Syrian or Antiochene ritual the words are: "*The seal of the true faith, the fulness of the gift of the Holy Spirit*." In the Liturgy of Jerusalem: "*The seal and impress of the true faith, and the fulness of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the unction of the pledge of the Kingdom of Heaven, of participation in life eternal and immortality, the perfection of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the shield of faith and righteousness*." Thus throughout the Universal Church, and in every period of its life, we find the same sure trust in the gracious bounty of our Heavenly Father given to His children, through His dear Son, and by the operation of His Holy Spirit, in the holy ordinance of Confirmation. The forms may differ, the words

may vary, but there is the same expectation, the same loving trust in the reality of the grace thereby communicated.

For what end, then, shall Christian parents bring their children to be confirmed? and how shall the candidates be taught to regard their confirmation? The renewal of their baptismal promises "in the presence of God, openly before the Church," is indeed a very serious and important act; but essentially it is identical with what they have done every time they have reverently, and as in God's sight, responded in the words of the Catechism, "Yes, verily, and by God's help so I will." It is the expression of a resolution, which they may repeat before God, with prayer for His help to keep it, throughout the remainder of their lives. Moreover, this public avowal is not essential to the validity of Confirmation. No such question is found in the English Prayer Book until the revision of 1662. All that was required in the earlier books was an examination of the candidate's knowledge of the Catechism. No such question is found in any other Service Book, Eastern or Western. While, therefore, the candidates should be taught to prepare themselves seriously and reverently for a true and earnest self-dedication in the solemn renewal of their baptismal promises, it would be a grievous injury to their profitable reception of Confirmation,

if they were not at the same time encouraged to expect from their Heavenly Father those abundant graces of His Holy Spirit which will assuredly be communicated through prayer and the laying on of hands to all those who come with loving faith to receive the Heavenly gift.

What are we to bid simple persons to look for in Confirmation, *except those very gifts which are asked for on their behalf?* "The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and the spirit of God's holy fear." Let us teach them to expect the gift of the Holy Ghost, the soul-pervading influence, the inward comfort and guidance of the Third Person of the God-head; the warmth of divine love kindling the purest affections in their hearts, the divine wisdom ennobling the higher spiritual powers of the reason; the infusion of larger and purer knowledge; the practical guidance of the spirit of counsel, helping them to form true judgments in cases of apparently conflicting duties; the inspiration of divine reverence. These are the inward life and grace of Confirmation. Herein to every faithful recipient is fulfilled our Saviour's own gracious assurance, "I will pray the Father and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the spirit of truth;" that Spirit of Whom the Apostle spoke

when he affirmed, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost;" that Spirit concerning Whom the Apostle asked the disciples at Ephesus, "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" Whom he conveyed to them by the laying on of hands; that Spirit for the reception of Whom Christians are "builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit;" that Spirit Whose fruits are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."—Nothing less than this fulness of divine grace, wrought by the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the regenerate, will satisfy the earnest craving of the devout adult candidate; as nothing less will answer to the sure trust expressed on behalf of her children by the Universal Church.



## QUESTIONS.

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*Question.* What is Confirmation?

*Answer.* A holy rite of the Christian Church.

*Q.* Has Confirmation any other name?

*A.* Yes; it is called the laying on of hands.

*Q.* Is Confirmation of recent origin?

*A.* No; it is of the greatest antiquity.

*Q.* What is the origin of Confirmation?

*A.* It is believed that this rite was amongst "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (that is, the visible Church), concerning which Christ "gave commandments to the Apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts i, 2, 3); for it has been practised in the Church from the very first.

*Q.* Has Confirmation ever ceased in the Church since the times of the Apostles?

*A.* No; but those who profess Christianity, and have lost the Apostolic ministry, have likewise lost "the laying on of hands," for Confirmation.

*Q.* Is there an outward sign in Confirmation?

*A.* Yes; the laying on of the Bishop's hands.

*Q.* Should we expect an outward sign in a Christian rite?

*A.* Yes; as the body is from God, as well as the soul and spirit, and as God's Word read and

preached reaches the soul through the body, we should expect that ordinarily grace would be conveyed to the soul by means of the body, and so by some outward sign.

*Q.* Is this the case with other Christian rites?

*A.* Yes; in Baptism the outward sign is water; in the Holy Communion it is bread and wine. The water is applied to the body; the bread and the wine are consumed by the body; and at the same time spiritual gifts are conveyed to the soul.

*Q.* Is there any inward gift or grace conveyed to the soul when the hands of the bishop are laid on the body in Confirmation?

*A.* Yes; the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Acts viii, 17; xix, 6).

*Q.* Who gives this inward gift?

*A.* God, who is the giver of all good gifts.

*Q.* Is this gift seen in the case of our Lord?

*A.* Yes; after He had been baptized, as a separate act He was praying on the bank of the Jordan, when the heavens were opened to Him, and the Holy Ghost visibly descended in a bodily shape like a dove and settled upon Him.

*Q.* Had this resting of the Holy Ghost upon Him been prophesied?

*A.* Yes; by the prophet Isaiah (chap. xi, verse 2): "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit

of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."

**Q.** What is the meaning of this passage?

**A.** That the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold strength should rest upon Him.

**Q.** But at first sight there seem to be only six spirits mentioned here, though the last is mentioned twice; why do you say sevenfold?

**A.** Because in the earliest translation of the passage, made in the third century before Christ, the last gift is not mentioned twice, but two separate gifts are enumerated, which make up the seven; and the Church of Christ has ever understood this passage to speak of the Holy Ghost in His sevenfold fulness.

**Q.** Do we find this sevenfold character ascribed to the Holy Ghost elsewhere in Holy Scripture?

**A.** Yes; in Revelation i, 4: "The seven spirits which are before the Throne;" and again in the prophet Zechariah (iii, 9; iv, 10): The seven eyes are explained to be "the eyes of the LORD." These passages are understood of the Holy Ghost, sevenfold in His operation.

**Q.** Why is the number seven employed?

**A.** Because in Holy Scripture seven is employed to represent completeness, fulness, and perfection.

**Q.** Are the sevenfold gifts prayed for in the Confirmation Service?

A. Yes; following the order of the passage in Isaiah, the bishop prays over the candidates first for the Holy Ghost Himself, then for His sevenfold or perfect fulness.

Q. Give the words.

A. "Strengthen them, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter; and daily increase in them Thy manifold gifts of grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of Thy holy fear."

Q. The bishop then prays that the Holy Ghost may rest on each candidate as He did on the man Christ Jesus?

A. Yes; and we believe that if the candidates be prepared for the great gift, and come with right dispositions, God will hear the prayers offered on their behalf, and will bestow the gift by means of the laying on of hands.

Q. Is this Confirmation prayer a new composition?

A. No; it has been used in the Confirmation Service for at least fifteen hundred years; and a similar prayer has ever been in use where the Apostolic ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons is in full preservation.

*Q.* Do you mean that the Holy Ghost in His sevenfold gift of fulness is the gift of God in Confirmation?

*A.* Yes; that is what the bishop prays for, and the Church would not tell the bishop to pray for what was not expected to be given.

*Q.* If a person, then, refuses to be confirmed by the laying on of the bishop's hands, is there a danger that the gift may not be received?

*A.* Yes; for we cannot invent means of grace, other than those we read of in the Bible.

*Q.* Is Confirmation, then, the only means of receiving this great gift?

*A.* It is the means appointed.

*Q.* Will the Holy Ghost come in no other way?

*A.* We have no right to say this; for "the wind bloweth where it listeth" (St. John iii, 8), and we may not limit God's power or will. But this is the means appointed, and therefore safe; we are not *sure* of receiving the gift in any other way. It is the duty and privilege of all baptized persons to be confirmed by the laying on of the bishop's hands, when they have the opportunity.

THANKS BE UNTO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE  
GIFT.

(II Cor. ix, 15).